DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 301 625 UD 026 539

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TITLE Testimony for a Hearing Called by Advocates for Children on the Status of Immigrant Children in the New York City Public Schools.
INSTITUTION New York City Dept. of City Planning, N.Y.
PUB DATE 25 Nov 86
NOTE 10p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Statistical Data (110)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Data Collection; *Educational Needs; Elementary Secondary Education; English (Second Language); *Enrollment Trends; Family Characteristics; *Immigrants; Information Needs; *Minority Group Children; Minority Groups; Population Trends; *School Demography; Statistical Analysis; *Urban Schools
IDENTIFIERS *New York (New York)

ABSTRACT

This report is intended to provide a statistical basis for discussion of the experiences of immigrant children in New York City (New York) public schools. Most of the information is taken from an analysis of the 1980 U.S. Census. Since 1980, school immigrant enrollments have followed a general shift away from European groups to those from the Caribbean, Asia, and Latin America, and an influx of refugees. Most settle in the boroughs of Queens and Brooklyn. Major findings include the following: (1) most new immigrants live in extended families in order to pay high New York rents, and in order for the earlier immigrants to contribute to the future of younger siblings and cousins; (2) immigrants made less use of public assistance despite the fact that the median household income for foreign-headed households was almost $1,500 lower than that of native-headed households; (3) 27.2 percent of public school enrollees and 35.4 percent of the non-public school enrollees were from immigrant-headed households; (4) the majority of these children were native-born; (5) 174,000 children whose parents were born in Puerto Rico, and are not counted as immigrants, were enrolled in the public schools; and (6) almost half of the children attending public schools have parents whose native language is not English. The Board of Education needs to improve its biographical data collection if it is to respond to the need for English language training and acculturation. Statistical data are included on six tables. (FMW)

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TESTIMONY FOR A HEARING CALLED BY ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN

ON THE STATUS OF IMMIGRANT CHILDREN IN THE NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

November 25, 1986

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INTRODUCTION

The great importance of today's hearing is that so much will be heard about the experience of New York City's immigrant children in the public schools and in the care of other social agencies. Their needs, met and unmet, will receive the attention they deserve. My role this morning is not to testify on these most vital subjects but rather to provide a statistical base for today's discussion.

In its population analyses, City Planning relies primarily on U.S. Census data. Most of the information I'll present to you this morning comes from our analyses of the 1980 Census. "1980," you may say, "--that's so long ago it isn't even relevant." I agree and disagree. The 1980 Census is still the best and fullest source of data we have on immigrants and their children. The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service admission files cannot produce such useful information, though it can produce information that is more up to date. The best prospective source of data on immigrant children is the Board of Education, and I hope that one outcome of today's hearing will be that the Board develops its excellent capacity for data collection and analysis.

Census data show that there were 1.68 million foreign-born persons living in New York in 1980, of which about 215,000 or 12.9 per cent were children under the age of 20. In comparison, children made up 33.5 per cent of the U.S.-born population. But things are not as they seem. The immigrant figure is 12.9 per cent if one looks only at foreign-born children of foreign-born parents, not at their U.S.-born children. Our data show that the majority of children living in households headed by an immigrant were born in the United States. We believe that any analysis of immigrant children has to look at the U.S.-born children of immigrant parents.

The official foreign-born total of 1.68 million probably missed several hundred thousand immigrants who did not wish to be known to the government. Immigrants who were able to evade the Census, we believe, were likely to be single people without children of their own who were probably living with the families of siblings or cousins. Immigrant children were probably not undercounted by much, although members of their family probably were.

In 1980, there were more Italian immigrants in New York City than from any other country of birth because the Italian inflow was so strong for so much of the century. But immigrants from other countries were gaining rapidly. In general, European immigrants were being succeeded by those from the Caribbean, Asia and Latin America, especially from the Dominican Republic, China, Jamaica, Guyana, Haiti, Korea, Colombia, Trinidad and Tobago, and India. School enrollments followed these general trends. In 1980, Russians (that is, Soviet Jewish refugees) were high on the list of immigrants, but their numbers have fallen off in the last couple of years as the Soviet government has clamped down on emigration.

Other changes since 1980 have included the change and increase in the numbers of other refugee and "entrant" groups arriving in New York. New York is now home to large numbers of Southeast Asian refugees, particularly Vietnamese and Cambodians. It received large numbers of Cuban and Haitian "entrants" during the 1980-81 boat lifts, and it is seeing increasing numbers of refugees from Poland, Rumania, Afghanistan and Ethiopia. City Planning does not have data on refugees or refugee children, but data should be available from the Refugee Data Center, an arm of the consortium of voluntary agencies that resettle refugees in the United States.

The largest numbers of New York City's immigrants and their children are to be found in the boroughs of Queens and Brooklyn. About 541,000 immigrants were living in Queens in 1980, and about 531,000 in Brooklyn. Manhattan was third with 349,000; the Bronx was fourth with 215,000; and Staten Island was a distant fifth with 34,500.

IMMIGRANT HOUSEHOLD DESCRIPTION

Households headed by immigrants have characteristics that distinguish them from households that are headed by native-born Americans, and those characteristics influence the environment in which immigrant children grow up.

For example, immigrant households are more likely to contain relatives and less likely to be single-person households or households made up of non-relatives. In immigrant family households, two married adults are more likely to be present than they are in native-headed families.

HOUSEHOLD TYPE (IN PERCENTAGES)
BY NATIVITY OF HOUSEHOLDER AND PERIOD OF IMMIGRATION

	TOTAL POPULATION	NATIVE-BORN	FOREIGN-BORN BY PERIOD OF IMMIGRATION			
			Total	Pre-1965	1965-1974	1975-1980
TOTAL HOUSEHOLDS	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Family Households	63.4	61.4	68.6	61.4	79.5	72.6
Married couple	44.0	40.8	52.3	48.9	57.1	55.5
Male householder, no spouse	3.0	3.0	3.2	2.5	3.8	4.7
Female householder, no spouse	16.4	17.6	13.1	10.0	18.6	12.4
Nonfamily Households	36.6	38.6	31.4	38.6	20.5	27.4
Householder living alone	32.6	34.0	28.8	36.6	17.7	22.7
Householder sharing living quarters	4.0	4.6	2.6	2.0	2.8	4.7

Source: 1980 U.S. Census Public Use Microdata File
Prepared by: NYC Department of City Planning

In 1980, there were almost 2.8 million households in New York City, of which 781,000, or 28 per cent, were headed by immigrants. About two million people lived in those 781,000 households. The composition of the native-headed households was not radically different from that of the immigrant-headed households overall, though the immigrant households did tend more often to have a spouse present and to have extended family members present.

The presence of extended family members was most notable among the most recent immigrants, i.e., those who arrived between 1975 and 1980. Many immigrants, but especially new immigrants, tend to live in extended families in order to pay New York rents, and in order for the earlier immigrants to make a contribution to the future of their younger siblings and cousins.

Contrary to popular opinion, the percentages of children present in foreign-headed and native-headed households were almost identical. Immigrant household and family size did tend to be slightly larger than native-headed household and family size, but the reason seemed to be the extended family members and not the children.

HOUSEHOLD RELATIONSHIPS BY NATIVITY OF HOUSEHOLDER
NEW YORK CITY 1980

	Native-Headed Households	Foreign-Headed Households	Foreign-Born Head Arrived 1975-1980
Total Persons	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Householder	41.2	37.5	28.5
Spouse	16.8	19.6	17.6
Child	33.3	33.6	35.4
Other Relative	5.3	6.8	14.2
Non-Relative	3.4	2.5	4.2

Source: 1980 U.S. Census Public Use Microdata File
Prepared by: NYC Department of City Planning

HOUSEHOLD AND FAMILY SIZE

	TOTAL POPULATION	NATIVE-HEADED	FOREIGN-HEADED
Average Household Size	2.50	2.43	2.67
Average Family Size	3.24	3.19	3.34

Source: 1980 U.S. Census Public Use Microdata File
Prepared by: NYC Department of City Planning

In a sense, the "immigrant" family is a myth; more than a quarter of the members of immigrant-headed families were born in the United States, the 1980 data show. About 62 per cent of the children were born here, as were 22 per cent of the spouses, 24 per cent of the other relatives, and 35 per cent of the non-relatives.

NATIVITY OF FOREIGN-HEADED HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS

	TOTAL MEMBERS		NATIVE-BORN MEMBERS		FOREIGN-BORN MEMBERS	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
TOTAL MEMBERS	2,082,500	100.0	576,220	27.7	1,506,280	72.3
Householders	781,000	100.0	-	-	781,000	100.0
Spouses	408,400	100.0	91,160	22.3	317,240	77.7
Children	700,600	100.0	433,820	61.9	266,780	38.1
Other Relatives	141,420	100.0	33,340	23.6	108,080	76.4
Non-Relatives	51,000	100.0	17,900	35.0	33,180	65.0

Source: 1980 U.S. Census Public Use Microdata File
Prepared by: NYC Department of City Planning

IMMIGRANT HOUSEHOLD INCOME AND PUBLIC ASSISTANCE USE

In 1980, the median household income for foreign-headed households was almost $1,500 lower annually than that of native-headed households: $12,783 compared to $14,325. Despite their lower incomes, immigrants made less use of public assistance. The overall public assistance use rate in New York City was 11.7 per cent; 13.3

per cent of native-born household heads received some form of public assistance, compared to 7.7 per cent of foreign-born household heads.

Although immigrants were 28 per cent of the city's household heads, they were only 18.4 per cent of all householders on public assistance.

IMMIGRANT CHILDREN IN THE SCHOOLS

At the moment, the Census is the only possible source of data on the numbers of immigrant children in the public and non-public schools, although the Board of Education has the capacity to compile data and produce analyses that are far beyond what the Census permits. We used Census data for our analysis of immigrant children in the schools, and we were given some confidence in our numbers by the fact that Census school enrollment totals for 1980 were very similar to Board of Ed. totals.

The 1980 Census data showed that a little more than a quarter of the city's public school children--27.2 per cent--came from households headed by an immigrant. Of those children, more than half were born in the United States. More than a third of the city's non-public school children--35.4 per cent--were from immigrant families, and of those children nearly four-fifths were U.S.-born. These figures include children age 3 to 19 in grades K-12.

CHILDREN OF NATIVE- AND FOREIGN-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS IN NEW YORK CITY SCHOOLS

	TOTAL ENROLLMENT	CHILDREN OF NATIVE-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS	CHILDREN OF FOREIGN-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS			CHILDREN NOT LIVING IN HOUSEHOLDS
			Total	U.S.-Born	Foreign-Born	
PUBLIC SCHOOLS						
Number	1,003,220	726,940	273,120	143,680	129,440	3,160
Percent	100.0	72.5	27.2	14.3	12.9	0.3
NON-PUBLIC SCHOOLS						
Number	309,880	199,740	109,580	84,340	25,240	560
Percent	100.0	64.5	35.4	27.2	8.1	0.2

Source: 1980 U.S. Census Public Use Microdata File
Prepared by: NYC Department of City Planning

Puerto Ricans are not immigrants, and the Office of Immigrant Affairs rarely studies them for that reason. But we did do a birthplace analysis for Puerto Rican children that was similar to the one for immigrant children. We found that in addition to the 273,000 children of immigrant families, the public schools were educating 174,000 children whose parents were born in Puerto Rico, bringing to a total of nearly 450,000 the numbers of children whose parents' native language was not English. That is almost half the schools' total enrollment.

CHILDREN OF PUERTO RICAN-BORN HOUSEHOLDERS
IN THE NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

	CHILDREN OF PUERTO RICAN-BORN HOUSEHOLDERS		
	TOTAL	MAINLAND-BORN	ISLAND-BORN
Number	174,380	138,320	36,060
Percent of Total School Enrollment	17.4	13.8	3.6

Source: 1980 U.S. Census Public Use Microdata File
Prepared by: NYC Department of City Planning

The ethnic distribution of the immigrant children in the public schools generally followed citywide immigration trends, the major countries of origin being the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, China, Guyana, and Trinidad and Tobago.

ISSUES FACED BY THE SCHOOLS

Because of the large numbers of children enrolled in the schools whose home languages and cultures are not Anglo, the schools face an enormous task of language training and/or acculturation. You will hear from many school personnel today about their students' service needs and the schools' progress in fulfilling them. I am not in a position to discuss these matters, but I do want to say a few

more words about data collection and analysis. The Board's data collection potentials are not sufficiently realized today to give us much statistical information about immigrant children, their needs, what they are getting from the schools, and how well they are profitting by what they are getting. I am sure that many a school teacher or principal knows the answers for his or her class or school, but the answers are not collected or analyzed centrally, so they are limited in their usefulness.

In a recent paper entitled, "Teaching for English Proficiency: The Need for an Evaluation of Language Programs in the New York City Public Schools," the Office of Immigrant Affairs identified the kinds of data that would be needed to evaluate the educational experience of language minority children--those never enrolled in language programs, those formerly enrolled in language programs, and those currently enrolled in language programs. The paper suggested specific data elements that might be added to the schools' centralized computer system or "bio" file; or, if already present on the file, be tabulated in such a way as to make program evaluation possible. The data elements include country of birth, language spoken at home, length of stay in a language program, and academic achievement. By cross-tabulating items like these, the Board could support its own efforts on immigrant childrens' behalf, and also make a remarkable contribution to our general knowledge of immigrant children in New York.